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File Code: 3420 **Date:** September 17, 2005
Route To:

Subject: Potential Insect and Disease Prevention/Suppression Project, Sacramento RD

To: Forest Supervisor, Lincoln National Forest

On September 1, Dave Conklin of our staff met with Dennis Dwyer, Jordan Wood, and Doug Porch (Sacramento RD) to examine the Walker dwarf mistletoe suppression project area tentatively proposed by Dennis. This letter includes observations made during this site visit and includes our recommendations.

The Walker project area lies southeast of the community of Weed, abutting private land. The area includes four separate low elevation (6800-7000) ponderosa pine "stringers" totaling 187 acres. Layout and marking of the four units was completed this spring. The upland slopes adjacent to the units—predominantly piñon-juniper woodlands—were thinned earlier this year under the SIKES program.

Little or no past management (thinning) has occurred in these four units. Units 1 and 2 are bisected by and easily accessible from Highway 24. Units 3 and 4 are west of the highway and less accessible.

Unit 1 (northeast unit) is mostly 80 to 90 year old pole and small sawtimber, with occasional older trees. Basal areas generally range from 120 to 150+ ft^2/acre. Scattered mortality has occurred the past few years; overall this stand is still mostly "intact" but appears highly susceptible to additional bark beetle activity. This area appeared to be largely free of dwarf mistletoe infection. Site quality is moderate, with an estimated site index of around 70.

Unit 2 (southeast unit) includes areas with more mature (120+ year old) timber, especially on the west side of the highway. Several acres on the east side of the highway have experienced heavy mortality the past several years. Signs of western pine beetle, roundheaded pine beetle, and ips engraver beetles were observed on several of the dead trees. Fallen snags have resulted in high fuel loading in portions of this area. Except where concentrations of mortality have occurred, basal areas exceed 120 ft^2. This unit is also largely free of dwarf mistletoe; site quality is comparable to Unit 1.

The lower (southern) portions of Units 3 and 4 are predominantly sapling stands (approx. 30 years old) while the upper portions are mostly pole and small sawtimber stands with extensive dwarf mistletoe infection. Site quality appears to be lower here than in Units 1 and 2.

Recommendations. Units 1, 2, and the lower portions of 3 and 4 should clearly benefit from the planned thinning, which would best be designated as a bark beetle prevention project. The existing mark would retain basal areas of 40 to 60 ft^2 of the best dominant and codominants in most areas; the sapling groups would be thinned to an average of 15 to 18 foot spacing. Some

products should derive from thinning of Units 1 and 2. Implementation between July 15 and December 15 is recommended to reduce the potential for an outbreak of *Ips*.

Because of the severity of the mistletoe and the relatively low productivity in the upper portions of Units 3 and 4, we recommend that these acres be excluded from the project area. There are relatively few good "leave trees" in these areas and it appears that the cost of thinning would exceed the benefit. However, we suggest that broadcast burning would be a good option for these areas. Fire generating sufficient crown scorch would provide some thinning and have a reducing effect on the mistletoe. Since much of the surrounding landscape (the P-J woodlands) has already been heavily-thinned (and will eventually be burned to reduce fuel loading), these remaining pine stringers may be ideal candidates to manage with fire.

Please contact us if you have questions about this evaluation or need additional assistance completing a project proposal.

/s/ David A. Conklin (for)
DEBRA ALLEN-REID
New Mexico Zone Leader, Forest Health

cc:
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